DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 995 48 FL 004 407

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TITLE A Continuing Survey of Foreign Language Resources of the Country through Professional Leadership in the Development and Use of Foreign Language Tests.
INSTITUTION Modern Language Association of America, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY Institute of International Studies (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jun 68
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests; Advanced Students; College Placement; French; German; Italian; *Language Proficiency; Language Teachers; *Language Tests; *Modern Languages; Russian; Spanish; Standardized Tests; *Student Placement; *Surveys; Test Construction; Test Interpretation; Test Results; Test Validity; Test Wiseness

ABSTRACT

The survey of foreign language testing described in this paper resulted in the issuing of three handbooks and a special validation report, encompassing the results of research, consultation with professional committees, and significant position statements in four major areas of foreign language testing: placement of incoming students in foreign languages at the college level, the use of standardized achievement tests in foreign languages and the preparation of teacher made tests, interpretation of the results of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students, and validation of the Proficiency Tests in terms of the native speaker. The paper includes a detailed outline of the objectives of the survey, the background of the survey, the methods and procedures used, and the results, findings, and conclusions. (Author/HW)

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ED 085995

FINAL REPORT

Contract No. OEC-1-6-062619-1876

F. Andre Paquette

Modern Language Association of America
62 Fifth Avenue
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A CONTINUING SURVEY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TESTS

JUNE 1969

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FL 004 907

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The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the project. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

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A Continuing Survey of Foreign Language Resources of the Country through Professional Leadership in the Development and Use of Foreign Language Tests.

June 1968, 549 pp.

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U.S. Office of Education, Institute of International Studies, Contract No. OEC-1-6-062619-1876.

The bulk of this report consists of three handbooks and a special validation report, encompassing the results of research, consultation with professional committees, and significant position statements in four major areas of foreign language testing: placement of incoming students in foreign languages at the college level; the use of standardized achievement tests in foreign languages and the preparation of teacher-made tests; interpretation of the results of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students; and validation of the Proficiency Tests in terms of the absolute criterion, the native speaker.

Part One, A Handbook on Foreign Language Classroom Testing: French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish treats the principal kinds of testing devices considered useful in classroom teaching. Informative guidance is provided on the importance and place of testing in the foreign language program; planning the classroom test; the construction of test items; preparing test items (including sample items for each of the five languages), and the interpretation and use of test results.

Part Two, A Handbook on the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Their Nature, Uses, and Limitations, affords the prospective user of the MLA Proficiency Tests with a detailed and comprehensive view of the Tests. The rationale, qualification statements, and format of the tests are reviewed, sample items in all five languages are provided, and an item analysis is undertaken. Reports of four research projects particularly relevant to the use of the tests are described, and a final chapter discusses the uses and limitations of the tests.

Part Three, A Handbook on Placement in Foreign Languages, is based largely on information developed from a study of placement practices at fifteen colleges and universities. Assumptions underlying current placement practices are analyzed, and a new approach is proposed involving a number of suggested assumptions and techniques. A set of appendices provide additional insights and views.

A separate report presents the results of a project designed to validate the MLA Proficiency Tests in terms of the absolute criterion , the native speaker. The title of the report is The MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Analysis of the Performance of Native Speakers and Comparison with that of NDEA Summer Institute Participants.

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I. SUMMARY

Objectives: The Modern Language Association (MLA) proposed to provide professional leadership in the field of foreign language testing in four areas: more efficient placement of incoming students in foreign languages at the college level; better use of standardized achievement tests in foreign languages and more sophisticated preparation of teacher-made foreign language tests; validation of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students (Proficiency Tests) in terms of the absolute criterion, the native speaker; more sophisticated interpretation of the results of the Proficiency Tests.

Procedures: Under the guidance of an Advisory Committee, the MLA conducted the following activities. (1) A conference on college foreign language placement was held with the cooperation of fifteen college foreign language department chairmen and the College Entrance Examination Board. From the conference workpapers and a series of case studies, a handbook on college foreign language placement was developed. (2) Modern foreign language methods instructors, measurements specialists, and language teachers participated in a series of conferences on the construction of classroom foreign language tests. After these meetings and field trials, a handbook on the construction and use of foreign language tests was written. (3) In order to validate the Proficiency Tests, the MLA administered them to native speakers living in their country of origin. (4) The MLA Director of Testing, his staff and the Foreign Language Test Advisory Committee continued to provide professional supervision in the use of the Proficiency Tests and Educational Testing Service (ETS) in their administration of the program to insure that it is consistent with public and professional interest.

Results: Three handbooks were produced: A Handbook on Placement in Foreign Languages in Colleges and Universities; A Handbook on the MLA FL Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Their Nature, Uses, and Limitations; and A Measurements Handbook for Teachers of French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish: A Guide to the Construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests. A report entitled The MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Comparison of the Performance of Native Speakers with that of NDEA Summer Foreign Language Institute Participants was published.

Contribution to Education: Through the above activities, the MLA has provided a continuing program of leadership in foreign language testing. These activities should strengthen existing tests in foreign languages, assist American teachers in properly using the standardized foreign language tests, and educate them in the principles of solid test building. All of these activities will lead to much greater precision in foreign language testing, providing thereby improved measurement controls for modern foreign language instruction and basic and applied research in this area of American education.

II. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

A. General Statement

Through the activities supported by this contract the MLA proposed to provide professional leadership in the field of foreign language testing. Four needs were seen as especially urgent: the assessment of the foreign language resources of the nation; the assessment of the need for the development of new tests and improved forms of existing foreign language tests; the promotion of effective use of test results in order to improve instruction in modern foreign languages in schools and colleges; improved measurement in research in foreign language teaching.

In designating the above activities as important, the MLA reflected the increasing concern of members of the profession with foreign language testing. Inquiries sent to the MLA asking for assistance in the selection and use of foreign language tests and test information, publications by such professional groups as the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and evaluations of foreign language tests, such as those in the Sixth Mental Measurements Yearbook,[1] all testified to an expanding need for leadership in foreign language testing.

B. Related Research

The MLA developed the Proficiency Tests under the authority of the United States Office of Education (USOE) Contract No. SAE 8349, dated 11 June 1959. Under subsequent contracts (OE-4-14-035 and OE-6-14-002) the MLA performed services related to the Proficiency Tests, and under Contract No. SAE 8827 it developed the MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Tests (Cooperative Tests).

Since their development, the Proficiency Tests have been administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey; copies of the Cooperative Tests are sold by the Cooperative Test Division of ETS.

The Proficiency Tests are used by several states as part of their certification programs, by NDEA Foreign Language Institutes as part of their pre- and post-institute evaluation of participants, and by many pre-service programs as part of their evaluation of future foreign language teachers. The Cooperative Tests are used extensively as diagnostic, achievement, and placement instruments in secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Both sets of tests have been used in basic and applied research by such members of the profession as Professor John Carroll, Harvard University, and Dr. Richard Spencer, Measurement and Research Division, University of Illinois. Under Contract OE-6-14-002, the MLA conducted a study designed to "vertically equate the Cooperative Tests to the Proficiency Tests," and a project to evaluate the Proficiency Tests.

C. Problems

The four problems identified and procedures proposed were essentially those of the MLA Test Advisory Committee whose members determined these to be especially crucial and in need of immediate professional attention.

1. College Foreign Language Placement

One of the perennial problems facing college departments of foreign languages is the proper placement of students who have begun study of a language in high school and find that the college department has expectations and approaches which differ considerably from those they have already encountered. Most often, college departments do not know the foreign language background of entering students while on the other hand, high school departments are unaware of the standards and goals for foreign language study on the college level. Misplacement in college foreign language classes is a source of confusion for students, and can lead to disorientation, failure and eventual discouragement from continuing language study.

The proper placement of students is further complicated by new developments in foreign language teaching over the past years. In the past the skills of reading and listening were emphasized and, for most pre-college students, only a two or three year language sequence was available. Today, all four skills are taught and many school systems offer significantly longer language sequences, often beginning in the elementary schools. Since each system has developed its own type of foreign language program the background of entering freshmen differs widely. The "Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages," endorsed by both the MLA and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), reflect the concern of the profession for good college placement programs in foreign languages.[2]

The MLA frequently receives letters requesting information on college foreign language placement. At its February 1966 meeting, the MLA Test Advisory Committee stressed the need for the profession

to examine college placement practices. The College Entrance Examination Board indicated its concern by agreeing to participate with the MLA in a conference to discuss college placement procedures.

2. Educating the Foreign Language Teaching Profession in the Construction and Use of Tests

In general, foreign language teachers at all levels of the educational system are both uninformed and unsophisticated about tests and testing. Their home-produced tests all too frequently fail to isolate the specific learnings which they seek to assess. Their interpretations of the results of commercially produced tests are likely to be naive. We are faced with a major problem in attempting to inform the profession about this critical aspect of language teaching.

The information needs to be disseminated through various channels. Institutes designed to improve teachers already in service might well give more attention to testing in the courses devoted to teaching methods. The same would be true of the current pre-service courses. Foreign language supervisors and school administrators generally could well profit from the same kind of information.

If this information is to be disseminated, materials must be provided. An examination of existing materials reveals, on the one hand, treatment so sophisticated or lengthy that it is inaccessible to many members of the profession, or, on the other hand, treatment so cursory as to imply that measurement is a relatively unimportant aspect of the instructional process. In order to remedy this situation, the MLA proposed to develop a set of informative materials for use in workshops, NDEA Foreign Language Institutes, and methods courses. Building on existing materials concerned with testing in general, the MLA Handbook concentrated on the specific problems of testing in modern foreign languages.

3. Validation of the Proficiency Tests; Administration to Native Speakers

"Inasmuch as a 'superior' level of competence in reading, writing, aural comprehension, and speaking was defined by the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Program of the Modern Language Association of America as proficiency approximating that of an educated native, it is regrettable that the tests of the aforementioned abilities could not have been administered to a representative sampling of educated natives . . ."[3]

While the Qualifications Statement[4] for foreign language teachers includes references in various places to proficiency comparable to that of "educated native speakers," the Proficiency Tests, which are based on that statement, had never been administered to native speakers in a controlled, systematic project designed to ascertain the validity of the tests. Nor was there an explicit statement of what the native speaker is assumed to know, either in terms of general competence, or in terms of performance on a

particular test. It was proposed, therefore, that data of the latter kind be obtained by administering the Proficiency Tests to an appropriate sample of native speakers.

The Test Advisory Committee recommended that the MLA administer the tests to natives living in their country of origin and possessing at least a high school education.

The results of the project yielded general and specific insights into the testing of foreign language skills and the validity of the Proficiency Tests. Performance of native speakers was compared with that of non-native teachers and students, and items on the Proficiency Test were identified which clearly confused or misled the native speakers.

4. Professional Leadership in the Use of the Proficiency Tests

The MLA with the assistance of the USOE has maintained supervision over the use of the Proficiency Tests since their development. There were urgent reasons why the MLA should continue to do so:

a. Under its Contract No. OE-6-14-002, and in cooperation with ETS, the MLA recommended and helped to implement a major change in the administration of the Proficiency Tests: starting 2 April 1966 they were administered through a National Testing Program (fixed dates, fixed test centers, fixed testing options, etc.) rather than through an institutional program (a system whereby an institution or agency may order any test, at any time, for administration at its convenience, and solely for its candidates). It was necessary that some professional organization observe and analyze the impact of such a major change to assure that it was consistent with the professional and public interest. National administrations were given in April, September, and November of 1966, April, September, and November of 1967, and in March of 1968. This system was carefully observed for two years, and comprehensive recommendations for altering the program were made in November of 1967.

b. Increased use by a greater variety of agencies has been accompanied by an increase in the number of requests for professional advice and assistance in using the test results. This public and professional interest continues to grow, the change to the National Testing Program is likely to encourage use of the tests. Professional advice to users of the Proficiency Tests has remained one of the needs of the public and profession, requiring specialized materials for interpretation of test results, and personnel capable of advising institutions and agencies in arriving at informed and effective policies for using those results.

c. Since the tests were developed to "maintain a continuing survey of the professional foreign language resources in teaching in the nation," and since it has always been the understanding of those involved in supporting, developing, and administering the tests that the tests should reflect professional needs

and developments, it remains desirable that a responsible professional organization maintain constant communication with the profession and public. This service includes providing a forum to representatives of institutions and agencies to discuss the present state of the tests, the administration of the program, and needed innovations in both.

d. ETS has always sought and received the assistance of the MLA in recommending, screening, and approving the professional scorers who are needed to assure the high level of reliability in this aspect of the program. Because of the high requirements and the natural turnover in personnel, there has continued to be a need for such professional advice to ETS.

e. It was imperative that a responsible professional organization have the available personnel, facilities, and communication with the profession to designate competent linguistics personnel to carry out revisions of existing forms of the tests and the development of new forms of the tests, as well as to make sure such revisions or new tests meet the specifications set forth by the foreign language profession.

III. METHODS

A. College Foreign Language Placement

At its October 1966 meeting, the MLA Test Advisory Committee drew up a list of types of institutions which should be represented in the placement project. A letter was sent to foreign language coordinators and supervisors in all states, requesting information on what they considered the most serious placement problems and what issues they wanted to see treated in the MLA handbook. Following the suggestions of the Test Advisory Committee and the state supervisors and coordinators, the MLA invited fifteen chairmen of foreign language departments, representing a broad range of state, private, small, and large colleges and universities, to participate in the Project on Foreign Language Placement.

A conference of the fifteen department chairmen was held in New York in March 1967 with a representative of the College Entrance Examination Board and the MLA Staff present. In preparation for the conference each chairman prepared a description of his institution and its actual foreign language placement practices. The descriptions served as the basis for discussions which led to a preliminary list of placement problems, general recommendations for improvement of practices, and specific suggestions for the handbook.

Follow-up visits were made by the MLA Director of Testing, an MLA Research Assistant and a representative of the CEEB to the campuses of the participating chairmen in April and May 1967. The purpose of the visits was to validate and expand the information presented in the chairmen's description through structured interviews with selected instructors and students. All three members of the project staff used the same guides for interviews and followed comparable ratios of students and instructors on all campuses. Where available, standardized test data on participating students, and all other students, were studied.

Throughout the period of the project, at professional meetings and through correspondence, the project staff solicited identification of problems and proposed solutions relating to the broad issue of continuity in foreign language study.

The MLA Handbook was produced, based on the three major phases of the project: 1) the results of the conference of chairmen, 2) the results of the on-campus interviews, and 3) the written responses to the direct solicitation for advice.

B. Educating the Foreign Language Teaching Profession in the Construction and Use of Tests

Following the suggestions of the Test Advisory Committee and others in the profession, the MLA invited fifteen modern foreign language teachers (three in each of the five commonly taught languages), three methods teachers, a measurements specialist, members of the Test Advisory Committee, and representatives from ETS and USOE to a conference on 17-18 February 1967 to discuss the handbook on the construction and use of tests in foreign languages. The MLA provided each participant with background materials on testing in general, foreign language testing, and measurement for the non-specialist.

The participants discussed the need for the handbook, what they thought the content and materials included in the handbook should be and the best approach to use to ensure that school teachers would read the handbook by achieving the best balance of theoretical and practical materials. The participants, working in language groups, produced several outlines. The writing of the handbook and the various parts of the handbook were also discussed.

After the February conference, the MLA worked to consolidate the outlines suggested for the handbook. Commissioned writers were engaged, and first drafts of most of the chapters were written.

A second conference involving the commissioned writers and the participants at the first conference was held in New York in May 1967. The participants suggested corrections and revisions of the first draft. Meeting in language groups they discussed the

collected sample items and tentatively classified the items according to a matrix provided by one of the commissioned writers. For each language, one person was appointed to edit and classify the items in that language.

ETS reviewed the items submitted in each language and provided a detailed analysis of each item with suggestions for improvement, where necessary. The heads of the language teams came to New York to review the items and the ETS criticisms. They selected, classified and revised the items to be included in the second draft of the handbook. The commissioned writers submitted their revised chapters for review by the MLA staff and one general commissioned writer.

Every Director of an NDEA Foreign Language Institute in 1967 was invited, along with his staff and institute participants to criticize the second draft of the handbook. These criticisms were collated and summarized.

In August 1967, a final conference of all participants, commissioned writers, and the MLA Test Advisory Committee was held. In light of the criticisms from the Institutes and the criticisms of the conference participants, revisions to be incorporated in the final draft were suggested. Taking the recommendations given at the conference into consideration, the commissioned writers wrote the final draft of the handbook.

C. Validation of the Proficiency Tests: Administration to Native Speakers

The Director of Testing appointed five Research Associates, each an expert in one of the five commonly taught foreign languages. All Research Associates adapted the Proficiency Tests to foreign language testing conditions translating test directions into the foreign language and modifying the test booklets and answer sheets. To assure that the translated and modified materials were readily understandable to native speakers, each of the Research Associates administered the modified tests to a sample of ten native speakers.

In each foreign country, a foreign coordinator was hired to coordinate the administration, to procure the necessary number of examinees, to prepare the language laboratory, and to make all necessary arrangements for the administration of the tests. Building on their experience with the sample administration to ten native speakers, all Research Associates adapted the tests to specific foreign language conditions, translating the directions, simplifying the marking of answers, and modifying the tapes as necessary. Personal Data Sheets were prepared in the target language asking for information on each examinee's background.

The administration of the tests were completed in all countries involved in the project except Russia where negotiations could not be finalized. Edward Allen administered 300 French tests in Lyon, France; Gustave Mathieu, 300 German tests in West Berlin, Germany; Salvatore Castiglione, 300 Italian tests in

Florence; and Filomena del Olmo, 100 Spanish tests in Madrid, 100 in Santiago, Chile, and 100 in Bogota, Colombia. Booklets and tapes were returned to ETS where the Speaking and Writing Tests were scored by professional scorers at ETS as were the two machine scored parts of the tests, the Reading and Listening Comprehension Tests. The personal data sheets were returned to the MLA to be analyzed.

Each Research Associate submitted to the MLA a report describing the procedures used, problems encountered, and personnel involved in the administration of the Proficiency Tests abroad. The Reports also included advice on limitations or special interpretations which should be placed on test data and the Research Associates' observations and evaluation of the project.

A report describing the project, reporting the data, and analyzing the tests scores and the data from the personal data sheets has been produced by the MLA.[5]

D. Professional Leadership in the Use of the Proficiency Tests

1. Proficiency Test Handbook

The MLA Director of Testing and the Research Assistant met with members of the ETS staff to discuss the specific features of the handbook including features specifically recommended by the MLA Test Advisory Committee. The Handbook for the Law School Admission Test: Its Nature, Uses and Limitations, which was prepared at the direction of the Law School Admission Test Council, was the example for the MLA handbook. The handbook incorporated the results of several studies on the Proficiency Tests such as Dr. John Carroll's work in testing college foreign language majors, the MLA staff project to vertically equate the Cooperative Tests to the Proficiency Tests, and the native speaker study. Material on the nature, uses, potential, and limitations of the Tests are also included in the handbook. The handbook extensively describes each of the seven areas of language teaching competence measured by the tests, describes each subsection of that test and provides sample items in all five languages as well as selected data used to analyze the reliability of the item in its own terms and in terms of the total test from which it is taken (item analysis). Normative data could not be included in the handbook but were provided as a separate insert, thus assuring both maximum flexibility and up-to-date information at all times. The MLA staff undertook the major writing of the handbook, while the ETS staff gave technical assistance.

2. The Dissemination of Information on the Use of the Proficiency Tests

The MLA Director of Testing continued to publicize the Proficiency Tests and to advise institutions, agencies and individuals in the use of the Tests. A paragraph on the National Testing Program was included in the first number of Foreign Language Annals, a publication of the Modern Language Association. Over 60,000 copies were

distributed to 1) recipients of state foreign language newsletters, 2) all foreign language teachers who belong to the MLA and are resident in the United States and 3) various other special mailing lists. Brochures on the Proficiency Tests were prepared each year and sent to all state foreign language consultants, editors of state and national foreign language newsletters, methods teachers, and city coordinators of foreign languages. At professional meetings, the MLA Research Assistant distributed booklets on the Proficiency and Cooperative Tests and answered questions on the use and nature of the two tests. During the 1967-68 National Testing Program, the ETS called the administrations to the attention of chairmen of foreign language departments and heads of state departments of education.

3. Supervision of Scoring Center at ETS

The MLA staff continued to screen and approve applicants for the Scoring Center at ETS. On 6 March 1967, the MLA Coordinator of Testing and the MLA Research Assistant met with several people from various departments of ETS to discuss establishment of a set of procedures for dealing with the problem of recruiting and training scorers. By 15 May 1967 a memorandum of agreement based on the discussions was prepared setting forth a preliminary description of the general outlines of the work involved in setting up the new system, and described the specific procedures to be employed. The memorandum was approved by the MLA on a one-year plan of operation. ETS dealt with the routine problems of securing and training scorers, according to the ETS-MLA memorandum of understanding. While ETS consulted the MLA only in cases of irregularities or possible changes in the system, close surveillance was kept over the program during the trial period. The first annual review was scheduled to take place in April 1968.

4. The National Testing Program

The Proficiency Tests were administered on 17 September 1966 to 326 examinees in thirty testing centers around the United States. While the number of registrants was considerably below that for the April 1966 (800), the MLA Staff was encouraged by the response which was far above that expected. For the 19 November 1966 administration, 789 were registered at forty-nine centers.

For the 1967-68 National Testing Program, five dates were confirmed. Although there had been a drop in FL Institute enrollment, the MLA expected that two new developments would offset this decline: first, according to the USOE handbook for preparing institute proposals, directors could now require that Institute applicants submit Proficiency Test scores; and second, almost half the institutions listed in the MLA publication, Vacancies in College and University Departments of Foreign Languages for Fall 1967 stated that Proficiency Test scores were desired for the applicants. However, by November 1967, it was necessary to cancel two of the five test administration dates scheduled for 1967-68 because of the combined effects of increasing costs and continuing low candidate volume for the Proficiency Tests. Approval for this was granted by the United States Office of Education.

5. Response to Inquiries About the Proficiency Tests

The MLA has continued to provide the necessary personnel and facilities to respond to any inquiries relating to the Proficiency Tests.

6. Test Advisory Committee

To advise the Director of Testing and his staff, the MLA appointed a seven member Test Advisory Committee which met several times during the period of this contract. The members represented institutions of higher education and education agencies (e.g., state departments of education) and provided the channels of communication between the MLA and the profession and the public. The Committee served as the editorial board for all the materials produced as part of this contract. The Director of Testing called to the attention of the Test Advisory Committee major areas of concern in foreign language testing. Their advice helped to assure the continuing effective assessment of the nation's foreign language resources. The MLA has served as a clearinghouse in matters of foreign language testing for the country.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In accordance with the provisions of this contract three handbooks were produced.

A. A Handbook on Foreign Language Classroom Testing: French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish

This Handbook has been produced to help the classroom teacher make efficient use of tests. It discusses the main purposes tests can serve and treats the principal kinds of testing devices that seem to be especially useful for those purposes in the context of foreign language teaching. And it has a section (Chapter V) on the interpretation of test results.

Much of what is contained in this Handbook is useful at all levels of instruction and with people of all ages. Some testing devices, however, are obviously not appropriate to children in elementary or even junior high school classes. The teacher should have no difficulty making a judicious choice.

Most teachers have in fact had some formal instruction in their own undergraduate education in the general principles of measurement, although very few classroom teachers seem to have had any formal instruction in principles and methods of testing in the specific context of foreign language teaching. Much of the general theoretical discussion contained in the Handbook will be more or less familiar to the reader. It is included here for several

reasons: to make the Handbook a self-contained unit; to remind the reader of principles and approaches he may have forgotten; and to fill in gaps in the reader's background.

This Handbook does not aim to be complete. For some teachers it will suffice, for others it will serve to inspire them to exercise their imagination and ingenuity. The Handbook discusses the following topics: The Importance and Place of Testing in the Foreign Language Program; Planning the Classroom Test; the Construction of Test Items; Preparing Test Items (a section is included with sample items for each of the five languages); and The Interpretation and Use of Test Results.

Most of the sample test items included in this Handbook were reviewed by the Foreign Language Test Staff of the Educational Testing Service.

B. A Handbook on the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Their Nature, Uses and Limitations

This Handbook was produced to help the prospective user of the MLA Proficiency Tests acquire a more comprehensive view of the Tests and how they might better interpret and use the results obtained.

The Introduction to the Handbook gives the reader a short summary of the background that led to the development of the MLA Proficiency Tests. The Tests are extensively described by (1) identifying the area of competence or knowledge, (2) repeating the appropriate section of the Qualifications Statement[6], (3) providing a brief description of each sub-section of that test, (4) providing sample items in all five languages and (5) presenting selected data used to analyze the reliability of the item--in its own terms and in terms of the total test from which it is taken; in short, item analysis.

The Third Section of the Handbook describes the validity of the tests and four comprehensive research projects particularly relevant to the use of the tests. Described are the studies of:

1. Melton and Myers (1964) who examined the relationship between scores on the Proficiency Tests and qualitative ratings given to about 3,000 NDEA Foreign Language Institute participants.[7]

2. A Comparison of the level of difficulty of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests and the MLA Foreign Language Cooperative Tests was made by F. A. Paguette, Suzanne Tollinger, Madeline Wallmark, R. E. Spencer, and F. J. Churchill.[8]

3. John Carroll's study of The Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year: A Survey Conducted in U. S. Colleges and Universities.[9] The major purpose of the study was to

assess the overall levels of foreign language proficiency attained by senior class students "majoring" or concentrating in foreign languages in colleges and universities of the United States and to identify factors strongly associated with these levels of competence, with the hope such information might suggest ways in which foreign language teaching for these students could be improved.

4. The analysis of the Performance on the Proficiency Tests of Native Speakers and comparison with that of NDEA Summer Institute Participants was conducted by F. A. Paquette, Suzanne Tollinger and Madeline Wallmark.[10] This validation of the Proficiency Tests by administering them to native speakers was performed under the terms of this contract.

The final chapter discusses the uses of the tests and their potential limitations. The principle which guided the design and development of the Proficiency Tests and the nature of the tests themselves gives a much wider potential for the use of these tests than originally envisioned. Because there are seven specific subtests for each of the five commonly taught languages (and three alternate forms for French, German, Russian and Spanish and two alternate forms in Italian) there is great versatility in the batteries themselves. The major limitation pointed out in the Handbook is the fact that the examinations are not capable of measuring the ability of any individual to function as a classroom teacher.

The tests provide the direct functions of measuring a person's specific competence in each of the individual skills and the three major areas of knowledge. It can measure proficiency prior to a particular experience and at the conclusion of it in order to measure the effects of the experience. Indirectly they function in placement, including the screening of candidates for particular positions and the grouping of students for any specific purpose.

One of the most promising potential uses of the Tests is in the area of staff training; at least three specific possibilities present themselves:

1. Through the use of the tests and other professional materials, a trainer of teachers, a department chairman, or any leader of foreign language teachers could educate his staff to write both performance objectives as well as general objectives for a foreign language program--either in the four skill areas or in the three knowledge areas. Individual items can become the basis for the development of specific performance objectives.

2. Using the MLA Proficiency Tests in conjunction with Chapter III (Construction of Test Items) of the MLA Handbook on Foreign Language Classroom Testing, trainees could be presented with a much broader sampling of test items--by language and by skill or by knowledge area. The trainees could examine professionally prepared items and then prepare items of their own based on these models. Of particular promise are the Listening Compre-

hension and Speaking Tests--areas which have always posed difficulty for individual teachers in the construction of testing instruments.

3. As is pointed out in the Handbook on Foreign Language Classroom Testing, two of the most difficult areas of competence for teachers to evaluate are speech and writing because these involve so-called "free response" or "essay-type" questions. Experience has shown that the halo effect involved in evaluating speaking and writing tests is the most difficult roadblock to effective assessment in these two skill areas. Through the use of the appropriate subtests in the MLA battery, a staff development program in an individual school, school system, college or university could be designed to train teachers in the objective scoring of oral and written essays.

Through the use of tests developed by leaders of the foreign language teaching profession and measurement specialists, it is possible to train teachers to more properly use test results or to be much more sophisticated in the development and use of teacher-made tests.

One major national use for the Proficiency Tests can be envisioned since the "secure tests" phase has concluded and since they also have been available for purchase for several years. One can foresee their possible maximum use in the future as making up the core of a large data bank of individual test items in each of the languages and each of the knowledge areas. Thus, the profession could have available to it the basis for creating a pool for foreign language test items which could be used in a wide range of circumstances by school, college, and other institutional personnel. In short, the trend towards performance criteria and criterion reference tests could be considerably hastened by the availability of such a pool. The only action which is required to create this pool is a major decision on the part of the Modern Language Association of America. This may well be the greatest contribution yet to be made by the MLA Testing Program which began in 1959.

C. A Handbook on Placement in Foreign Languages in Colleges and Universities

This project was designed to help the foreign language teaching profession find ways to improve continuity and articulation of instruction from one grade level to the next and from one administrative unit to another. The Handbook is based on information gathered from a close study of the foreign language placement practices of fifteen colleges and universities, as well as from statements and publications gathered from the profession at large.

Emerging from a comparison of the divergent placement practices at the fifteen institutions, a set of fourteen basic assumptions were identified and analyzed by the project staff. Proceeding from this analysis of prevailing assumptions, the authors of the Handbook propose, in Part V, a new approach to college foreign language placement, based on:

1. A new set of assumptions which all students and teachers accept.

2. A new approach to describing the background and determining the probable success of each student.

3. A new approach to describing school and college foreign language offerings.

4. Several general recommendations for developing a continuing basis for sound placement practices in the future.

Each of the four components of the new approach is outlined in detail in Part V of the Handbook. A set of appendices provide information on techniques used to obtain data from the fifteen institutions studied in detail, plus a selection of publications and position papers received from members of the profession at large.

V. CONCLUSIONS

During the first half of the 1960's, an increase in prosperity and student population, together with a general awakening of interest in foreign language study, led to a rapid expansion of language instruction at all levels of American education. In many ways the foreign language teaching profession was unprepared for this expanded demand for its "product," not only in terms of numbers, but also because the "product" itself had been widely "advertised" to be something not all teachers were prepared to supply. The shift in emphasis from the traditional teaching of grammar and translation to speaking and listening skills had left many teachers and departments confused--and in many cases poorly informed--about aims and methods, techniques, and materials for audiolingual teaching.

The area of testing and measurement was one in which the problems created by the "revolution" in foreign language teaching were most clearly noticeable. (1) Teachers were in desperate need of devices for evaluating student classroom performance according to criteria that would go beyond mere grammatical accuracy and employ as an ultimate standard the proficiency of a native speaker. (2) As more and more institutions adopted new methods and approaches in their language instruction, problems arose in connection with the placement of college freshmen who wished (or needed) to continue language study already begun in high school. College language departments recognized the need for objective measures of language proficiency unrelated to specific texts or teaching materials. (3) As it began to develop new criteria for measuring the proficiency of its students, the teaching profession also became aware of a need to evaluate the proficiency of its own practitioners and ultimately to standardize the training of future teachers.

In response to these needs, the Handbook and other materials produced by this project have as their aim nothing less than the "professionalization" of those members of the community of foreign language teachers in the United States who still fall short of professional standards in their preparation or teaching practice, or both. The materials will succeed only to the extent they can be disseminated, discussed, and seriously implemented by responsible members of the profession who recognize the necessity of placing a common goal ahead of individual convenience. Much depends upon the ability of the leadership of the profession to arouse a sense of responsibility among the rank and file of foreign language teachers, individually, and collectively through their various organizations.

FOOTNOTES

1 The Sixth Mental Measurements Yearbook, ed. Oscar Krisen Buros. (Highland Park, New Jersey 1965)

2 "Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages," PMLA, LXXXI (May 1966).

3 The Sixth Mental Measurements Yearbook, p. 675.

4 "Qualifications for Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages," formulated by the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Program. See Wilmarth H. Starr, "MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students," PMLA, LXXVII (September 1962), 8.

5 The MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Analysis of the Performance of Native Speakers and Comparison with that of NDEA Summer Institute Participants, eds. F. Andre Paquette, Suzanne Tollinger, and Madeline Wallmark. (Modern Language Association, New York, 1968)

6 Wilmarth H. Starr, op. cit. [see above, footnote 4]

7 A Study of the Relationship Between Scores on the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students and Ratings of Teacher Competence. C.T. Myers & R.S. Melton, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.: TDR-64-4, April, 1964.

8 A Comparison of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students with the MLA Foreign Language Cooperative Tests. F.A. Paquette, Suzanne Tollinger, Madeline Wallmark, R.E. Spencer & F.J. Churchill; Modern Language Association, June, 1966.

9 The Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year: A Survey Conducted in U.S. Colleges and Universities. John B. Carroll. Final report for U.S. Office of Education. Laboratory for Research in Instruction, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 1967.

10 The MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students: Analysis of the Performance of Native Speakers and Comparison with that of NDEA Summer Institute Participants. F.A. Paquette, Suzanne Tollinger, & Madeline Wallmark, Modern Language Association, June, 1968